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Source or Clarifying Statement:

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From  Venezuela, 15 Sep 1951

1. One afternoon as we were starting a Daily Vacation Bible School in one of the camps the priest came to visit us. My first thought was that I was back in Colombia but immediately I felt that here we really had more freedom and I waited for the priest to make the first move. When I announced that another class would be held the following day, the priest forbade all Catholics to attend because we were Protestants. Holding my Bible high I said, "I am not here to deceive anyone. I am an evangelical missionary and I'm here to teach you stories from this book -- the Word of God. No one is here under obligation. If you heard anything bad here this afternoon you may stay in your houses tomorrow but if you heard something good you are all welcome to come back tomorrow and hear more of God's Word." Then I closed the class in prayer. The priest didn't say another word until we had finished and once again he forbade all the Catholics to attend. We continued the class all week with good attendance. On another occasion a school teacher told our children the devil was going to get all the evangelicals.
2. We find there is much opposition with our children's work. The priest, school teachers and parents all try to hinder the children from attending the classes. We feel that parents have this privilege but many times when parents actually want the children to attend, the little ones are threatened by their teachers. There is freedom of religion in this country according to the constitution but as in Colombia and other Latin countries, it is freedom in theory and not in practice.

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3. Religious persecution continues in Colombia. Don Marcos Franco and his family received the Lord as their Saviour some four years ago and they have known continual persecution during these years -- first having to flee from the town they were living in at the time of their conversion. For two years they have been holding meetings in their home in Santa Ines with an attendance of 80. The police began to threaten them raiding their meeting and carrying away machetes, knives, shaving razors and all Bibles, hymnbooks, etc. Two of the men were beaten, one imprisoned for a time and then shots fired into the house. At midnight, 25 February, 1952, the police arrived with a group of hoodlums and set fire to the thatched roofed house. As the family opened the door to escape, they were met with machetes and guns. They stayed in the flaming house praying until the heat became unbearable and again they opened the door and saw the enemy had left so they escaped to the woods. They lost all material possessions but the whole family is safe in Ocaña.

Colombia, April 1952

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4. Word of our work in [redacted] reached the Catholic priest in the city of Barranca Bermeja. A visit was made to tell these people in [redacted] that surely God will punish them if Bibles and Testaments are not burned at once and the Protestant pastor driven from town. But to his surprise not even free beer interested the people and it even provoked them to preach his a sermon against its use. He left, his purpose thwarted, only to return again and again, sometimes with gifts for the people and other times with threats. He circulated Colombia with a folder to stir people to give to the cause to drive the heretics out of Carare. All of this drove the believers closer to Him and caused the Gospel to shine even brighter.

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5. ...Pressure from the hierarchy was driving him [the priest] to more drastic moves. He went to the governor and denounced the mayor of Carare and had another named from another town; a man who would obey his dictates. The priest with the new mayor and his family moved back into town. They put in a business-- a fancy liquor store. Immediately our chapel was closed, our workers threatened with jailings if they visited the people or held services even in homes. Our school was closed and we were ordered out of the building. In a few days the priest opened the Catholic school in our building. The believers protested -- all in vain. The believers are being denied the privilege of worshipping God in so-called Christian Colombia. They can't have their children educated because they are Protestants. We are taking the matter to the national government.

Colombia, 17 Mar 1951

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6. For Colombian children the school-year begins in the early part of February and extends through November. Thus it was that with the Christmas festivities a thing of the past many boys and girls were eagerly looking forward to donning their blue and white uniforms and taking up their studies once again in the Colegio Americano, about to commence its thirty-fifth year. There had always been a feeling of resentment against the Colegio in certain quarters, but this year the propaganda made from the pulpit of the Catholic church was doubled, and the public assured and reassured that the Colegio would never again be permitted to open its doors to receive students. Some believed the rumors but most did not, and on 6 February, many children trooped through the gate into the patio of the school, where the school-year was begun with the entire group singing the Colombian National Anthem followed by some Gospel hymns. By the end of the fourth day of classes one hundred and fifty children were matriculated, and the Colegio Americano once again had one of the largest enrollments in Armero, and all seemed to be going well.
7. The next day, we, as directors of the Colegio, were shown a copy of a telegram sent to the mayor's office by the department of education of the State of Tolima, ordering the authorities in Armero to "proceed with energy" and close down the Colegio immediately as it had yet to be inspected by the State. We had weeks

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before notified the secretary of education of our intention to open on 6 February, and had repeatedly asked that the inspector be sent to us, but to no avail, so had begun classes anyway, along with the other schools of Armero which had not been inspected either. Now there was nothing to do but close and appeal once again for a visit from the inspector, as in every other way the Colegio fulfilled the requirements of the government. It soon became obvious that the authorities were going to try to keep us from reopening simply by with-holding the visit of the inspector. Finally, as they began to realize that we would not give up so easily, the inspector arrived. After looking about and finding the buildings and records in good order, he informed us that the decree ordering all government schools to attend mass in a body each Sunday, to place an image of the sacred heart of Christ in each classroom, and to hold a daily rosary, now applied to private schools as well, and that the secretary of education in Ibagué was awaiting a letter from Lorentz saying that he would comply with the new ruling. Lorentz said that he would like a letter from the secretary to that effect, for the Colombian constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and that thus any of our students who wished to attend the ceremonies of the Catholic Church were free to do so, but that he could not force those who hold other beliefs to go to mass if their conscience prevented them from doing so. The letter never reached us, and the secretary said it was a mistake and that we did not have to observe the ruling after all.

8. The next obstacle to present itself was the recent decree that the secretary of education had dictated prohibiting co-educational instruction beyond the second grade. We had inquired of the secretary's office what this meant, and had been told that we had to have separate classes for the girls and the boys, which we had done. However, now they informed us that this was not enough, that we had to build a six-foot high, ninety-foot long concrete wall down the middle of the patio so that our third, fourth, and fifth-grade boys and girls cannot see nor communicate with each other. During the construction of the wall, we moved all the furniture from our living-room and dining-room, and converted them into classrooms for the third, fourth, and fifth-grade boys, who arrived shortly before seven-thirty in the morning and were with us until after four in the afternoon. The wall is now completed and despite the propaganda saying that the school would never reopen, the Colegio Americano is once again in full-swing, and the Bible classes so designed as to lead the children to a saving knowledge of Christ are going on as usual.
9. Although the Colegio had been closed for classes, the days were not idle ones, and the second week of February saw several hundred people congregated nightly in its patio, to attend a series of special evangelistic meetings. During these meetings we had several encounters with members of the police force, which is controlled by the Catholic priest. While the last service was in progress, three policemen rounded the corner and stood in front of the Colegio, threatening to kill the speaker and do away with the "communists." Nothing so drastic happened, but as the people began to leave the chief of police drew out his revolver as if to shoot at the crowd. Some of the women became panic-stricken and ran. Another policeman took a New Testament from one of the young people.

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